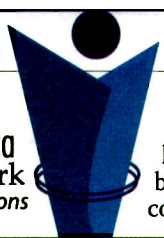


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STRATEGIC CAPABILITY NETWORK'S PANEL of thought leaders brings decades of experience from the senior ranks of Canada's business community. Their commentary puts HR management issues into context and looks at the practical implications of proposals and policies.

# Three simple words can make all the difference

In building meaningful global partnerships and co-working effectively and successfully with different cultures, three simple words make all the difference for Stephen Miles of Harlequin Enterprises: awareness, engagement and appreciation.



Trish Maguire  
LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

In listening to his experiences and viewpoint, you can understand the shift that is happening and has to happen if organizations wish to succeed in the international world of business. Managing diversity and being customer-centric is not enough in today's global marketplace. Unmistakably, building partnerships and initiating multicultural relationships are the two fundamental underpinnings to Harlequin's global achievements. The company's way of thinking is expansive. Its emphasis is on everyone's ability to be more than aware of other people's outlooks, perceptions and values. They excel at being consistently open and predisposed to sharing outcomes, collaborating and establishing how they can meet customers' needs — together. There is no room in their approach for a win-

lose ending, only a win-win for all parties. With his unique stories and real examples, Miles illustrated the need for and value gained by taking the time to know the other parties' business almost as well as you know your own. The underlying messages were clear as to how you can make a meaningful difference in building affirmative relationships. Key tips for leaders included: making sure they have done their research with the intention of appreciating the other party's industry, their competition, their challenges and their threats; find-

ing out how they can help their clients resolve their difficulties and setbacks; conscientiously encouraging everyone to be open to sharing ideas without judgment and to enthusiastically learn from each other; and convincing everyone to be willing and prepared to change the way they have been doing business in order to achieve something greater. Harlequin is an outstanding example of how multicultural partnerships involve careful selection and attentive nurturing over and above what is traditionally defined as relationship management skills. Harlequin embraces an all-inclusive approach where not only the leadership team is involved, but also middle managers, people managers and the workforce at large. Its onboarding programs and employee development programs demonstrate an integrated approach where multicultural training is incorporated into team-building and relationship management skills training. For any leaders looking to enhance and expand their global success, there are three simple

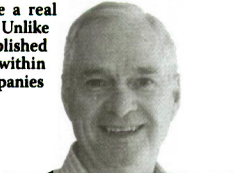
codes of behaviour from the Harlequin model that can be acted on immediately. First is communication. Undoubtedly, the more communications there are between you and your client, and the more transparent, honest and straightforward the relationship, the easier it will be to build a trusting, long-term relationship. Second is to establish integrity by keeping commitments. Do what you say you will do, every single time. If you make a promise to fix something, look into it or follow up to fulfill that promise, without a hitch, every time — only then will people know and believe they can trust you. Third is to stay focused and flexible. Doing things the way you have always done them because it worked that way in the past does not work in today's continuous-change state of affairs. Sometimes, it's about stopping and re-assessing your processes, technology platforms, clients' experiences and results — good and bad. It's important to be mindful about creating an organizational culture from the top down that

emphasizes influential learning, encourages risk-taking, and advocates innovation and long-term, continuous improvement. Multiculturalism is an evolving process; it is qualitative. It's the shift that occurs when we stop defining everyone by one cultural norm and move to an understanding of multiple norms. Critical to this process is the breaking down of systemic barriers to fairness, open-mindedness and neutrality. Multiculturalism can only exist when we make a well-informed commitment to change. Thank you, Harlequin Enterprises, for reminding us it really is that simple to build great multicultural relationships in a global marketplace.

Trish Maguire is a commentator for SCNetwork on leadership in action and founding principal of Synergy Solutions in Nobleton, Ont., focused on high-potential leadership development coaching. She has held senior leadership roles in HR and OD in education, manufacturing and entrepreneurial firms. She can be reached at [synergyx@sympatico.ca](mailto:synergyx@sympatico.ca).

# Embracing 'high-context,' 'low-context' cultures

Small Canadian businesses have a real challenge growing internationally. Unlike large corporations that have established reputations and are well-known within the international arena, small companies struggle to even be acknowledged.



Morgan Smyth  
LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

Also, large corporations can hire foreign agents to establish connections within other countries. These agents are familiar with the local cultures and usually know key people there. Smaller firms typically don't have the money or talent to do this, so they must do it themselves. Not only does this take them away from critical duties back home, but they must operate in an unfamiliar culture. How can we do this most effectively? Stephen Miles of Harlequin Enterprises thinks the best way to approach this is to first understand how the culture of the country in question affects its communication style. After accumulating more than two million Air Miles points and a plethora of passport stamps, Miles succinctly concludes that in order for small Canadian businesses to establish a successful presence in any foreign country, they "must adapt to the cultural structure of that country." Every country has its own cultural traits. We in Canada see subtle differences between our American neighbours and ourselves; the same goes for England and us. The contrast is even more pronounced between the West and eastern cultures such as Japan, China and India. Edward T. Hall, in his 1976 book *Beyond Culture*, defined these traits in terms of

North America and Europe, time is treated as a commodity: "Time is money," "Do it now." Our view of time is very linear. In Latin countries, such as Spain, Italy, Mexico and those in South America, time is looked upon as what we're working on and with whom we are working. Therefore, it is important to be flexible with time because relationships are more important. In Asian countries, time can be considered "circular." Issues are revisited several times. People prefer to "walk around the pool" several times to ensure the right decision is made. These circular events may include tea ceremonies with the Japanese or visits to the Great Wall with the Chinese before any discussion about a business venture is even mentioned. You have to be patient and respectful of their processes, which are based on harmony and Confucian and Buddhist philosophies. Another aspect of diverse cultures is the way workers interact with each other. In western cultures, particularly the U.S. and Canada, we tend to be individualistic. We pride ourselves on the amount of responsibility and authority we have, as discussed in Geert Hofstede's model *Power Distance*. In Latin and eastern cultures, it's the opposite; they tend to value group participation and achievements. Brainstorming sessions typically don't work there because people don't publicly volunteer their ideas because they could be perceived as mavericks. Subordinates rarely question their super-

iors openly. Malcolm Gladwell says this may be why Korean Air, in the late 1990s, had so many crashes — the reluctance of co-pilots to countermand or even question pilots' decisions. Miles states the three key ingredients for success with any foreign culture are to be aware of its nuances, appreciate its beauty and elegance, and embrace it — enjoy it and learn from it. By employing this approach, we become more

aligned with new foreign partners and significantly improve our potential to grow and succeed in new and thriving markets. Morgan Smyth is an SCNetwork thought leader and a change management consultant who launched his own IT services company which soared to Profit Magazine's 50 Fastest Growing Companies. He is based in Toronto and can be reached at [msmyth@braegen.com](mailto:msmyth@braegen.com).

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